The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba

The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba, or the Older Scottish Chronicle as it is sometimes known, is the only surviving narrative account to derive from the nascent kingdom of Scotland. It recounts the careers of the kings from Cináed mac Ailpín (d.858) to the middle of the reign of Cináed mac Maíl Choluim (971-95), and is mostly an account of internecine strife, raids on Northumbria and campaigns against the Vikings. Whilst it is not a work of any great literary merit it is the only native source to the history of this period which has otherwise to be reconstructed from later fanciful poetry and chronicles or the occasional notice of 'Albanian' affairs by Irish and English chroniclers. It is thus a unique source into how the kings of Alba and their associates saw the birth of the kingdom.

The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba / The Scottish Chronicle in the Poppleton Manuscript. The main source for Scottish history c.850-c.975.

1. So Kinadius [Kenneth] son of Alpini, first of the Scots, ruled this Pictland prosperously for 16 years [842/3-58].

2. Pictland was named after the Picts, whom, as we have said, Kenneth destroyed; for God deigned to make them alien from, and void of, their heritage, by reason of their wickedness; because they not only spurned the Lord's mass and precept, but also refused to be held equal to others in the law of justice.

3. Two years before he came to Pictland, he had received the kingdom of Dál Riata [840/1].

4 In the seventh year of his reign [848/9] he transported the relics of St Columba to a church that he had built.

5. And he invaded England six times; and he seized and burned Dunbar and Melrose. But the Britons burned Dunblane, and the Danes wasted Pictland to Clunie and Dunkeld.

6. He died of a tumor ultimately on 13th February, the third day of the week, in the palace of Forteviot.

7. Duuenaldus his brother held the kingdom for 4 years [858-62].

8. In his time the Gaels with their king at Forteviot made the laws of the kingdom [those of] Edi [Aed] son of Ecdach [king of Dál Riata, c. 748-778].

9. He died in the palace of Cinnbelachoir [apparently near Scone] on April 13th.

10. Constantinus son of Cinadi reigned for 16 years [862-876].

11. In his first year [862] Maelsechnaill king of the Irish died, and Aed son of Niel held the kingdom [of Ireland].

12. And after two years Amlaib [Olaf] with his Gentiles wasted Pictland, and dwelt in it from January 1st to March 17th.

13. Again, in his third year [866] Amlaib, drawing a hundred [ships?], was slain by Constantine.

14.A little while afterwards, a battle was fought by him [Constantine] in his 14th. year [875] at Dollar, between Danes and Scoti and the Scoti were slain [and driven] co Athcothlam [to Atholl]. The Northmen spent a whole year in Pictland.

15. Edus [Aed] held the same [kingdom] for one year [876-8]. The shortness of his reign has bequeathed nothing memorable to history. He was slain in the civitas [monastery?] of Nrurim.

16. And Eochodius son of Run king of the Britons [of Dumbarton], grandson of Kenneth by his daughter, reigned for 11 years [878-89]; although others say that Ciricium [Giric] son of another reigned at this time, because he became Eochaid's foster-father and guardian.

17. And in his second year [879] Aed son of Neil died.

18. And in his ninth year, on the very day of St. Cirici [Cyrus], an eclipse of the sun occurred. Eochaid and his foster father was now expelled from the kingdom.

19. Doniualdus son of Constantini held the kingdom for 11 years [889-900].

20. The Northmen wasted Pictland at this time.

21. In his reign a battle occurred between Danes and Scots at Innisibsolian: the Scots had victory.

22. He was killed at Opidum Fother [Dunottar] by the Gentiles.

23. Constantinus son of Edii [Aed] held the kingdom for forty years [900-940x5].

24. And in his 3rd year [903] the Northmen plundered Dunkeld, and all Albaniam [Alba].

25. In the following year the Northmen were slain in Straith hErenn [Strathearn].

26. And in his 6th year [905/6] king Constantine and bishop Cellach, on the Hill of Belief near the royal city of Scone, pledged themselves that the laws and disciplines of the faith, and the laws of churches and gospels, should be kept in conformity with the Scoti. From that day on the hill has deserved its name, that is, the Hill of Belief.

27. And in his eighth year [908] the most exalted king of the Irish and archbishop fell in Leinster, that is, Cormacc son of Culennan.

28. And in his time Doneualdus king of the Britons [of Strathclyde] died; and Duneualdus son of Ede [Aed] king of Ailech [Tirconnel, Co. Donegel]; and F1ann son of Maelsechnaill and Niall son of Ede who reigned for three years after Flann.

29. And the battle of Tinemore took place in his 18th year [918], between Constantine and Regnall [Ranald], and the Scotti had victory.

30. And the battle of Duinbrunde [Brunanburgh] in his 34th year [mistake for 37th, i.e. 937], and in it fell Constantine's son and after one year he died.

31. Dubucan son of Indrechtaig mormaer of Oengusa [Angus]; Adalstan son of Aduar [Edward]; and Eochaid son of Alpini died.

32. And in his old age, being decrepit, he [Constantine] took the staff [i.e. entered a monastery], and served the Lord; and he gave up the kingdom to Mael son of Domnaill.

33. Maelcolaim son of Domnaill reigned 11 years [940x5-54].

34. Maelcolam went with his army to Moreb [Moray] and killed Cellach.

35. In the 7th year, of his reign [949] he plundered the English as far as the river Tees, and he seized a multitude of people and many herds of cattle: and the Scots called this the raid of Albidosorum, that is, Nainndisi. But others say that Constantine made this raid, asking of the king, Maelcolaim, that the kingship should be given to him for a week's time, so that he could visit the English. In fact, it was Maelcolam who made the raid, but Constantine incited him, as I have said.

36. And Constantine died in [Malcolm's] 10th year [952], under the crown of penitence in good old age.

37. And the men na Moerne [of the Mearns] slew Malcolaim at Fetteresso, that is, in Claideom.

38. Idulfus [Illulb] held the kingdom for 8 years [954-62].

39. In his time opidum Eden [Edinburgh] was evacuated, and abandoned to the Scots until the present day.

40. A fleet of Somarlidiorum [Vikings] was slain in Buchan.

41. Niger [Dub] son of Maelcolaim reigned 5 years [962-6].

42. Fothach bishop [of the Scots] rested [i.e. died].

43. [A battle] between Nigerum [Dub] [and] Caniculum [Culen] upon the ridge of Crup in which Niger [Dub] had the victory, [and] where Duchad abbot of Dunkeld and Dubdon satrapas [mormaer] Athothlach [of the men of Atholl] fell.

44. Niger [Dub] was expelled from the kingdom and Caniculus [Culen] reigned for a brief time.

45. Domnal son of Cairill died.

46. Culenring [Culen hringr ?] reigned for 5 years [966-71].

47. Marcan son of Breodalaig was killed in the church of St. Michael [in St.Andrews]; Leot and Sluagadach went out to Rome; Bishop Maelbrigd rested [i.e. died] [and] Cellach son of Ferdalaig reigned [as Bishop of the Scots]; Maelbrigde son of Dubican died.

48. Culen and his brother Eochodius were killed by the Britons [of Strathclyde].

49. Cinadius [Kenneth] son of Maelcolaim reigned . . . years.

50. He immediately plundered Britain [Strathclyde] in part. Kenneth's infantry were slain with very great slaughter in Moin Uacoruar.

51. The Scots plundered Saxoniam [England] to Stanemore, and to Cluiam, and to the lakes of Deranni.

52. And Kenneth walled the banks of the fords of Forthin.

53. After a year, Kenneth went back and plundered Saxoniam [England] and carried off the son of the king of the Saxons [i.e. the English].

54. It is he who founded the great monastery of Brechin for the Lord.

Translation adapted from A.O.Anderson, Early Sources of Scottish History A.D. 500-1286 vol. i (1922). The original Latin can be found in M.O. Anderson, Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland (2nd edn, 1980), pp. 249-253.

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